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ABSTRACT

The degree to which state departments of education utilize appropriate strategic planning techniques in the development of statewide education is examined. A modified survey instrument, the "Strategic Planning Questionnaire," was mailed to state educational planning coordinators of 56 states and territories, eliciting 45 responses (an 80 percent response rate). Findings indicate that, in the aggregate, state-level educational policy makers adhere to many of the tenets of strategic planning, which include an articulated vision of the planning process, regular evaluation of individuals and departments, development of strategic plans for all levels within the department, assessment of the external environment, change, as called for when external environments require it, and implementation of plans. A recommendation is made for the development of an information support network among state-level K-12 planners. (LMI)

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The Application of Strategic Planning to the Development of Statewide Educational Programs

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Running Head: STATEWIDE STRATEGIC PLANNING

Abstract

The degree to which state departments of education were utilizing appropriate techniques for strategic planning was studied. Each of the 56 states and territories were surveyed utilizing the "1990 Strategic Planning Questionnaire." Completed responses from 45 states and territories were analyzed. Mean scores for each survey question ranged from a high of 3.49, which is a strong strategic response, to a low of 1.48. State or territory scores ranged from a high of 3.63 to a low of 2.37. A measure of the study questionnaire's reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha resulting in a coefficient alpha of 0.70. The study concluded that, in the aggregrate, state-level educational policy makers adhere to many of the tenets of strategic planning.

The Application of Strategic Planning to the Development of Statewide Educational Programs

Since the publication of Time for Results: The Governors' 1991 Report on Education (National Governors' Association, 1986) two issues have, in the judgment of the authors, crystalized. First, the educational reform movement, whether it is characterized as first, second or third wave, is and will remain a powerful force in American society. The recent adoption of a national agenda for public education by President Bush and the nation's Governors (Brosnan, 1990), serves as a significant reinforcement of the strength of the reform movement. Second, the responsibility for conceptualizing, planning, and effecting the reforms will clearly reside with the individual states. The federal role will be that of advocate and cheerleader, not fiscal sponsor (Riggs & Goodwin, 1988).

Given the premise, the question arises, to what extent are the individual states utilizing modern strategic planning techniques to chart courses for their public education systems. A brief discussion of early education planning models, programs for statewide educational planning, and the contemporary strategic planning method follows.

Early Education Planning Models

Contemporary educational planning models have their genesis in the "systems era" which began in the 1950's (Kimbrough & Nunnery, 1983). Herbert Simon (1957) and his later work with James March (1958) are exemplary of the movement. Simon's concept of bounded rationality recognized the overwhelming complexity of "pure" decisioning as he advocated reduction of decisioning to satisficing rather than maximizing. Building on this early conceptualization of organizations as systems, educational agencies and schools have, over the past three decades, adopted a variety of planning techniques. Three of the most widely used techniques are the incremental approach, the modeling/forecasting approach, and the systems approach.

The incremental planning technique came into broad application during the 1960s. The technique focuses on achieving short-term solutions. It also seeks to balance the various political power groups within and external to the institution by encouraging power brokering and "asking the right questions."

During the 1970s, modeling or forecasting techniques gained significant support as a planning technique within the education community. This technique had its roots in management science and relied heavily on rational decision-making processes supported by quantitative information and sophisticated modeling and forecasting procedures (Richardson & Rhodes, 1985). The approach was viewed as a rational method for the deployment of resources with an emphasis on managing for

efficiency and on "doing it right." The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) was a major proponent of this planning approach.

Kaufman's (1988) work is an illustration of the application of the systems approach to educational planning. His methodology utilizes the steps of needs assessment, mission analysis, and function analysis.

Statewide Education Planning

A review of the literature suggest that there have been few formal efforts to develop statewide plans for public education. This dearth of statewide planning is evident in a study which was designed to assess the status of "distance learning" in K-12 public education (Downing, 1984). A questionnaire mailed to the 50 states asked information on the characteristics of long-range planning performed at the state department of education level. With 28 states responding, only one (New York) indicated that a "long range strategic plan" was being developed. Downing concluded that "the same issues raised by computer technology today will confront state departments of education tomorrow unless strategic planning takes place today" (p. 26).

Kaufman (1989) in his discussion on mega-planning suggests that successful planning efforts deal not only with the questions *what is* and *what should be*, but also adds the dimension of *what could be*. The Minnesota Plan (Berman, 1985) meets such standards. Convinced that fine tuning the existing structure would not bring

about necessary changes, Minnesota state education officials decided a major redesign was in order. Their comprehensive long-range plan embraced transitional plans, budgets, and projections for a 10 year period. The plan's uniqueness is illustrated in one section which gives students the option of attending secondary school or post-secondary school starting in the tenth grade.

Texas provides another example of a well-designed state plan. Legislation passed as Texas House Bill 72 (Levinson, 1988) mandates that the state board of education review the educational needs of the state, establish goals for the public school system, and adopt and promote four year plans for meeting these needs and goals. With the governor in the lead, the state department of education was completely reorganized to accommodate the formation of 40 work groups--one group for each statewide planning goal.

James Moss (1988) cites another example of a forward looking state education agency. To resolve the problems of increasing enrollment, low per capita income, and a very low per student expenditure, Utah's five-year plan called for the use of advanced technology to turn schools into learning centers. By employing technology, the state expects to maintain high academic standards without bankrupting the system.

Still other models of futuristic planning include New Hampshire's telecommunications program for public education (Watt, 1988). Governor Sununu launched a five million dollar initiative that focused on technology to "leverage the capacity of teachers as professionals" (p.114). In addition, Missouri's plan for

education embodies the need to reduce the number of students in remedial classes (Hausman, 1989). With a statutory mandate to provide parent and family support at every school, Missouri expects to greatly reduce the cost of remedial education.

Apart from California's Omnibus Reform Acts, most examples of long range planning and strategic planning occur within the school district or at the school level. These efforts are apparently fostered by the lack of planning at the state agency level. To compensate for the lack of state leadership in planning, many schools are forming consortiums to meet the heavy demands of long range planning (Cawelti, 1989).

Kirst (1988) makes the point that since A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform was published, most of the reform effort has fallen on the unit schools. Initially they were asked only to change course offerings and tests, but now educators are asked to change the nature of pedagogy. This task may be too difficult to achieve at the school level given the continuing demand for other improvements. The problem according to Kirst may be that state politicians are confused as to the meaning of restructuring and need for long range planning.

The review of literature indicates that there has been a lack of educational planning at the state level. This is puzzling since it has not been due to a lack of information or resources. In his guide for policymakers, Cooper (1985) points to the numerous planning activities in the areas of budget, management, human services, and economics that exists within the state bureaucracies. Evidence of long range planning for education programs, however, has been absent.

Strategic Planning

The concept of strategic planning has been actively embraced by the education community following the publication of George Keller's (1983) best seller, Academic Strategy: The Management Revolution in American Higher Education. As defined in this context strategic planning consists of an analysis of data about an organization's internal and external environments, e.g., demographic, social, economic, technological, and political factors. These analyses provide a basis for developing a vision for the future of the institution. In turn, this process yields a listing of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, from which an organization derives a set of assumptions about future conditions. As a final step the organization focuses a strategy for long-term survival that supports short term operational decisions.

> Strategic planning has been characterized as seeking to foster institutional adaptation by assuring congruence between an institution and its relevant and often changing environment, by developing a viable design for the future of the institution, by modifying it as needed, and by devising strategies that facilitate its accomplishment (Peterson, 1980, p. 140).

Numerous models of strategic planning are cited in the professional literature (Groff, 1988; Cope, 1986; McCune, 1986). These models all suggest an assessment of an organization's external environment to determine opportunities and threats, an audit of an organization's internal environment to determine strengths and

weaknesses, and the activation of a pro-active plan to favorably position the organization given changing environmental parameters. This process described as strategic choice by Cope (1986) stipulates that:

> Strategic choice involves a major decision altering the relationship of the institution to its environments. Too often, any important decision is considered strategic. The key word is environment. A strategic decision alters the institution's resource-acquisition or resource-depletion relationship with the environment. Strategy determines the nature and the direction of the institution. Strategic choices relate to scope of services, choice of those served, growth considerations, and the nature of relationships with other organizations. Strategic choices deal with "what" rather than "how" (p.73).

The educational organization moves over time through an external environment. During this journey there is an on-going process of adaptation and accommodation as the organization seeks to survive. The organization itself can be characterized as having four dimensions: structure, goals and values, psychosocial and technical. The strategic plan seeks to array its internal characteristics as complementary to the external environment in a manner most likely to achieve desired results.

Methodology

The Survey Instrument

Meredith, Cope, and Lenning (1987) developed a "Strategic Planning Questionnaire" that distinguishes among those institutions of higher education actually engaged in strategic planning and those not conforming to the principles of the planning technique. The authors of this survey instrument assert that it "can be used by institution officials to assess their planning or how well campus personnel understand strategic planning" (p.1). Meredith, Cope, and Lenning are noted researchers in the area of strategic planning, and through their work and earlier work by Lenning (1982), they identified those items differentiating strategic planning from other forms of planning or those items that are important for strategic planning to succeed. Items for their instrument "went through extensive review and fine-tuning" (p.8). It is the authors' opinion that the Meredith, Cope, and Lenning instrument is a valid measurement of strategic planning implementation in higher education institutions.

For the current study, the instrument developed by Meredith, Cope, and Lenning (1987) was modified to assess the extent to which state departments of education were utilizing strategic planning in the development of statewide programs for public education. Items from the original questionnaire were reworded to address the strategic planning concepts as understood by respondents at state-level public education institutions. One question from the original instrument was changed to

include the use of the word "proactive", which the strategic planning literature consistently indicates is a key element in the implementation of strategic planning techniques. The revised questionnaire presents twenty questions and invites responses using four point Likert scales. Questions on the instrument request respondents to indicate the planning efforts at their state department of education by marking whether or not each question is *Definitely True*, *Somewhat True*, *Somewhat Untrue*, or *Definitely Untrue*. Using the Meredith, Cope, and Lenning classification of the correct "strategic" responses, answers of *Definitely True* or *Definitely Untrue* receive a score of four if correct and a score of one if incorrect. Answers of *Somewhat True* or *Somewhat Untrue* receive a score of three if correct and a score of two if incorrect. The list of questions are provided in Table 1. An additional item on the questionnaire invites respondents to comment on any of the issues addressed by the survey questions. The modified instrument is designated as the "1990 Strategic Planning Questionnaire".

Meredith, Cope, and Lenning do not report any psychometric parameters for their instrument. Consequently, for the current study, a measure of the instrument's reliability was determined using Cronbach's alpha resulting in a coefficient alpha of 0.57. Four questions (Questions 1, 7, 12, and 15) had low item correlation scores and were deleted to produce an alpha of 0.70. This is a fairly strong measure of the internal consistency of the remaining questionnaire items, indicating that this

instrument is a reliable measure of the underlying construct--strategic planning (Crocker & Algina, 1986).

Some respondents were critical of the wording of several questions, and indicated they were not able to accurately interpret them. It is the authors' belief that the respondents' lack of knowledge about the vocabulary used to describe strategic planning may have lead to their problems with interpretation. Therefore, prior to adopting this instrument for further studies, it is recommended that either: (a) respondents clearly have a working vocabulary used in strategic planning, or (b) the questions are re-worded through example or definition to ensure respondents accurately interpret the questions.

Data Source and Results

During January 1990, a letter was mailed to the chief state school officer of each of 56 states and territories requesting that the "1990 Strategic Planning Questionnaire" be completed by the state department of education staff member responsible for coordinating statewide educational planning. A follow-up letter was mailed three weeks after the initial communication to stimulate non-respondents to complete and return the questionnaire. Completed questionnaires were received from 45 states and territories for an 80% response rate.

Table 1 shows the mean scores for each question, ranging from a high of 3.49 (Question 18), which is a strong strategic response, to a low of 1.48 (Question 1). The

overall mean for all states and territories responding was 2.74. State or territory scores ranged from a high of 3.63 (strongly strategic responses) to a low of 2.37. Using the middle score of 2.5 or higher to indicate those having a better understanding of the process of strategic planning, 91% of the respondents scored at or above 2.5 and 9% scored below 2.5.

Discussion

With the overall mean score of 2.74 approaching the Likert scale anchor of *Somewhat* strategic and with 91% of the respondents scoring at or above 2.5, it can be stated that, on the aggregate, state-level education policy makers adhere to many of the principles of strategic planning. An analysis of the individual question responses that received the highest strategic responses, indicates that most state departments understand basic tenents of strategic planning, including:

1. an articulated vision of the planning process.
2. a regular evaluation of the department's mission as well as the individual decisions and goals of the department.
3. all levels within the department must develop their own strategic plans.
4. scanning of the external environment is a key component to successful planning.
5. change is an essential feature when the external environments demand change.

6. implementation of formulated plans is a necessary feature of good strategic planning.

It is apparent that some state departments of education (those with lower "strategic" scores) are not implementing strategic planning as defined by this survey instrument. Certainly for these policy planners, and even for those who do indicate some use of strategic planning, additional information about the benefits of strategic planning and appropriate implementation techniques would ensure better planning at the state level. It is further suggested that state departments of education implement strong programs to inform their staffs, public officials, and other public school authorities about the effectiveness of strategic planning. The instrument used in this study or a modification of it could be an excellent basis for beginning the discussions in the use of strategic planning in state departments of education.

The high response rate obtained by this study (80%) suggests that there are strong interest levels by state departments of education in strategic planning. Some of the comments that were included in the respondents' answers to the questionnaire are indicative of state department efforts to implement strategic planning:

"We are in our third year of strategic planning. . . . We are . . . systematically developing a vision of the information society and the needed role of public education."

"Our planning efforts are tightly linked to our policy analysis efforts."

Perhaps the best recommendation that can be made concerning the use of

strategic planning by state departments of education came from one respondent who wrote: "There is a need for state level (K-12) educational planners to form a group for helping each other and sharing ideas."

Earlier investigations into state-level planning processes implied that little was being done to plan effectively. It is clear to the authors of this study that states are becoming more active in planning systems of public education through the use of strategic planning. The respondents to this study seem to be aware of their planning responsibilities. Nevertheless, we encourage state departments of education to analyze and compare their individual state-level efforts in strategic planning to the "correct" strategic responses in Table 1 so that continued and additional benefit may be obtained from the strategic planning process.

Table 1

Mean Score for Questions on the Strategic Planning Questionnaire

	Correct Strategic Planning Answer	Mean Score
1. The primary purpose of planning is to develop a blueprint for the state's educational programs.	False	1.48
2. The mission of the State Department of Education (SDE) is regularly reviewed and clarified in terms of "What business we are in."	True	3.30
3. "Doing things right" is considered more important than "doing the right things."	False	2.76
4. The SDE's statement of mission/purposes is considered more important for public relations than as a guide for the SDE's future.	False	3.44
5. Central to the planning process is a clearly articulated vision of what the state educational program is to become.	True	3.38
6. It is desired that the state educational program be stable and relatively unchanging so it can withstand a turbulent environment.	False	3.00
7. Assessment of strengths and weaknesses of the SDE is important, but not important as regular assessment of opportunities and threats in the environment.	True	2.61
8. Planning relies primarily on analysis of concrete, objective data, rather than on opinions, values, traditions, and aspirations.	False	2.51
9. Environmental scanning is done regularly to assess trends and changes in social/ demographic technological, economic,and political influences.	True	3.14
10. Annual budgets and/or the governing structure largely determine what the state educational program will be doing in the future.	False	1.96
11. Extrapolation is used as a primary method to anticipate change in the external environment.	False	2.32
12. Strengths of other state education departments are regularly assessed.	True	2.38
13. New program decisions are usually a reaction to outside influences, such as other governmental programs or mandates and public opinion.	False	2.42
14. The SDE is proactive.	True	3.11
15. Ambiguity, when it occurs in planning, requires more study so that certainty can be improved before decisions are made.	False	2.14
16. Strategic plans are developed at other organizational levels within the SDE in addition to an overall SDE Strategic Plan.	True	3.09
17. Strategic choices are consistently made that re-position the SDE in more favorable positions.	True	2.77
18. There are both formulation and implementation stages in the strategic process.	True	3.49
19. Following strategic decisions, resources are, infact, directed/redirected to insure that decisions are implemented.	True	3.20
20. Following implementation of strategic decisions, review and evaluation is carried out to insure that decisions and goals are met, with modification as necessary.	True	3.27